Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/02/28 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000504130012-9

WASHINGTON POST
17 January 1987

CIA Recalls Station Chief From Costa Rica

By Doyle McManus
and Michael Wines
Los Angeles Times

The CIA recalled its chief officer in Costa Rica last week for aiding the private airlift of weapons to Nicaraguan contras during a ban on U.S. military aid to them, administration and congressional sources said.

The intelligence agency told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence this week that it recalled its station chief from the U.S. Embassy in San Jose, the Costa Rican capital, because of "unauthorized contacts with private benefactors" who were aiding the rebels, a knowledgeable source said.

Congress is investigating that incident as well as other reports that Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, the White House aide who oversaw both the administration's efforts to win private support for the contras and its secret arms sales to Iran, received more assistance from the Central Intelligence Agency than has been reported, the sources said.

The station chief, whose name has not been divulged, is thought to have relayed messages between contra groups in Costa Rica and members of the secret air force operated by retired major general Richard V. Secord, the sources said.

According to one source, the CIA station chief also passed messages about the airlift directly to North, who was then an aide to the National Security Council. A congressional aide said that the Senate intelligence committee was investigating that issue but that it had not yet drawn conclusions.

The incident raises new questions about the CIA's role in the airlift, which dropped tons of weapons and ammunition to rebels inside Nicaragua until one of its planes was shot down Oct. 5, killing three crewmen and delivering a fourth into the hands of the Sandinista regime.

The CIA has repeatedly denied any role in the airlift. Congressional sources noted that the agency's report to the Senate intelligence committee condemned the station chief's actions as unauthorized.

But they said that Congress was investigating reports that the officer's actions were encouraged by senior officials at CIA headquarters outside Washington and that North reported many of his activities in Central America to the agency as well.

Kathy Pherson, speaking for the CIA, said that she could not comment on the reported recall of the station chief. "All I can say is that the CIA has complied with all congressional restrictions on assistance to the contras," she said.

Congress banned U.S. military aid to the contras, who are fighting the government of Nicaragua, from mid-1984 until last October. Under a 1985 revision of the law, the CIA was allowed to provide the rebels with intelligence information and communications equipment but no other military assistance.

Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/02/28 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000504130012-9